

January 11, 2008

Bush Outlines Mideast Peace Plan

By [STEVEN LEE MYERS](#)

JERUSALEM — President Bush outlined Thursday in the clearest terms so far the shape of a two-state peace treaty he is hoping to broker between [Israel](#) and the [Palestinians](#) by the end of his term.

He called for redrawing borders and compensating Palestinians and their descendants for homes they left in what is now Israel.

Speaking after two days of meetings with Prime Minister [Ehud Olmert](#) of Israel and the Palestinian president, [Mahmoud Abbas](#), Mr. Bush said, “I believe that any peace agreement between them will require mutually agreed adjustments to the armistice lines of 1949 to reflect current realities and to ensure that the Palestinian state is viable and contiguous.”

He added, “I believe we need to look to the establishment of a Palestinian state and new international mechanisms, including compensation, to resolve the refugee issue.”

In the face of deep skepticism from both sides, Mr. Bush expressed confidence that a final treaty would be signed during his last year in office.

“I’m on a timetable,” he said when he met Mr. Abbas in Ramallah in the West Bank, only minutes after saying he would not impose timetables on the negotiators for both sides. “I’ve got 12 months left in office.”

Mr. Bush did not offer specific detailed prescriptions for the core issues he addressed: where to draw new borders, how many Israeli settlements in the West Bank will have to be uprooted in a final deal or how to compensate a Palestinian diaspora numbering in the millions now for homes and lands lost long ago, let alone how to pay for it.

Many of the issues Mr. Bush addressed in his statement, delivered alone at his hotel, have been at the center of previous peace talks that ultimately failed, and reflected American policy long pursued by Mr. Bush and his predecessor, [Bill Clinton](#). But having faced criticism for speaking of peace only in the broadest way, Mr. Bush publicly addressed what are known as the core issues, even if those remain subject to intense negotiations.

By endorsing compensation for refugees, Mr. Bush sided, at least indirectly, with an Israeli view that the return of Palestinians to Israel was unacceptable since it would change the identity of Israel as a Jewish state. Similarly, he endorsed the notion of Israel as “a homeland for the Jewish people,” and “Palestine as a homeland for the Palestinian people.”

At the same time, he emphasized that a new Palestine would have to be “viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent,” a stance somewhat at odds with Israeli desires to retain some security controls even after a treaty.

“Achieving an agreement will require painful political concessions by both sides,” he said after spending the day traveling to the West Bank.

On Jerusalem, the city each side claim as its capital, he endorsed no view, calling its status “one of the most difficult challenges on the road to peace.”

“But that is the road we have chosen to walk,” he said.

Mr. Bush’s visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories, his first as president, reflected his deepening involvement in the kind of shuttle diplomacy he once scorned. And in his appearances here he displayed a new urgency for the process he set in motion at an international meeting in Annapolis, Md., in November.

Mr. Bush’s national security adviser, [Stephen J. Hadley](#), said Mr. Bush would return to Israel and the region at least once, in all likelihood for

the 60th anniversary of Israel's founding in 1948, to be commemorated in May.

The White House also announced the appointment of a senior Air Force commander, Lt. Gen. William M. Fraser III, to serve as a mediator of disputes between the Israelis and Palestinians over their compliance with their previous agreements. That role was a crucial part of the agreement reached between Mr. Abbas and Mr. Olmert in Annapolis, thrusting the United States squarely in the role of adjudicating between the sides. General Fraser, who accompanied Mr. Bush to Ramallah, serves as an assistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Neither Mr. Olmert, who dined with Mr. Bush after his statement, nor Mr. Abbas, responded publicly to Mr. Bush's statement. An Israeli official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said the statement was not unexpected and "would serve as the basis for further negotiation." Aides to Mr. Abbas declined to comment, though during their meeting earlier, Mr. Abbas praised Mr. Bush, addressing him in effusive formality.

"Our people will not forget Your Excellency, your invitation and your commitment toward the establishment of an independent Palestinian state," he said.

Mr. Hadley, speaking to reporters afterward, emphasized that details must be ironed out in talks that Mr. Olmert and Mr. Abbas agreed to accelerate earlier this week. But he added that Mr. Bush was articulating terms that the two sides had begun to discuss in their negotiations, though neither leader has been so specific in outlining the shape of a compromise.

Mr. Bush's choice of language was clearly intended to comfort both sides. He declared that it was time "to end the occupation that began in 1967," when Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza in a war. While he has used the word "occupation" before, he does so rarely because of Israeli sensitivities.

He avoided a reference to the “borders of 1967,” a mantra of Palestinian and Arab leaders, by referring instead to the armistice lines of 1949. Still, the fundamental point, and one strongly held by Israelis, was that the line dividing Israel from a future state of Palestine would have to change from the current division between Israel and the occupied West Bank.

Appearing with Mr. Abbas in Ramallah, Mr. Bush also expressed strong support for a future state without pockets of Israeli settlements. “Swiss cheese isn’t going to work when it comes to the outline of a state,” Mr. Bush said.

He also delivered some of his strongest criticism of Israel yet when he responded to a question about what are widely viewed among Palestinians as efforts to undermine Mr. Abbas’s government and security forces.

The Israelis, Mr. Bush said, “ought to help, not hinder, the modernization of the Palestinian security force.” Mr. Bush also reiterated the requirement by both sides to abide by their agreements in the “road map,” including a halt to any Israeli expansion of settlements.

Foul weather brought Mr. Bush unexpectedly in contact with Israel security measures that have become a main grievance for Palestinians and their leaders. His helicopter grounded, Mr. Bush drove in a motorcade to Ramallah, passing through an Israeli checkpoint in the hulking concrete barrier the Israelis have erected along and inside parts of the border with the West Bank.

Asked about his own impressions seeing the barrier for the first time, Mr. Bush acknowledged Israel’s security measures and the hardships they cause.

“Checkpoints create frustrations for people,” he said. “They create a sense of security for Israel; they create massive frustrations for the Palestinians. You’ll be happy to hear that my motorcade of a mere 45

cars was able to make it through without being stopped, but I'm not so exactly sure that's what happens to the average person."

Isabel Kershner contributed reporting from Ramallah and Jerusalem.